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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [SN](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: VICE FOREIGN MINISTER HEADING TO BURMA

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Vice Foreign Minister Yabunaka will visit Burma September 29 to October 3 and is willing to convey a message from the USG to Burmese officials, MOFA contacts said on September 21. Japan is "deeply concerned" about the recent crackdown, but is not planning to issue a public statement condemning it because it might have "negative consequences" for Japan's diplomatic channel with Burma. Tokyo is not convinced a statement would induce a positive response from the Burmese government, and would "not necessarily improve the situation," according to MOFA. Japan shares U.S. support for Special Adviser Gambari's efforts to facilitate transition to a democratic government, and would welcome a decision for Gambari to brief the UNSC following a Burma visit. Singapore's DCM in Tokyo told Embassy Tokyo that "Japan has no Burma policy." End Summary.

"Visit Has No Special Timing"

¶2. (C) Vice Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka will visit Burma September 29 to October 3 in response to a "long-standing invitation" from the Burmese authorities, MOFA Principal First Southeast Asia Division Deputy Director Atsushi Kuwabara told Embassy Tokyo. There is "no special timing behind the visit:" Yabunaka merely did not have time to visit Burma up until now, Kuwabara explained. The VFM will "convey what the Burmese government may not want to hear" and will reiterate Japanese concerns about the slow pace of democratization there. Burma must improve its human rights record and "political environment" before Japan can strengthen bilateral ties, Kuwabara said.

Still No Public Statement

¶3. (C) In response to Japanese Embassy Minister Counselor Ishii's September meeting with DAS Marciel in Washington, MOFA reexamined its decision to hold off on issuing a public statement condemning the crackdown on protesters in Burma. Nevertheless, it still has no plans to issue a statement at this time, Kuwabara said. Japan is deeply concerned about the situation in Burma, especially the detention of peaceful demonstrators, but does not think a public statement would be beneficial. Last September, Japan voted in support of putting Burma on the UNSC agenda, and Japan has continued to use bilateral channels with high-level Burmese officials to "quietly call" for Burma to step up efforts to improve human rights and democratization, Kuwabara stated.

¶4. (C) Japan, however, is not convinced a public statement would induce a positive response from Burmese officials and it would not necessarily improve the situation, he continued.

Moreover, it might have a negative effect on the channel Japan uses to communicate with Burmese officials, Kuwabara explained. Japan will continue to use this channel to quietly pressure Burma on human rights and the importance of democratization, he stated. Yabunaka is willing to pass along a message from the USG to his interlocutors, he stated.

Support for Gambari Visit

¶5. (C) Japan supports efforts for Special Adviser Gambari to visit Burma, particularly given the likelihood he would meet with both senior regime leadership as well as Aung San Suu Kyi. Tokyo does not have a strong preference on the timing for when the visit should occur. Japan would welcome a decision for Gambari to brief the UNSC following his visit, Kuwabara noted.

One ASEAN Insider's View of Japan's Burma Policy

¶6. (C) Singapore Embassy DCM Ong Eng Chuan told Embassy Tokyo Political Officer September 21 that "at this point, Japan has no Burma policy." They used to have good contact with both Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, but these have dried up. Because the Japanese Government has no sense of where it wants to go with Burma, its policy has been allowed to drift, and "Japan uses certain ASEAN members' Burma policy as a shield for itself," Chuan explained.

Schieffer